

夢幻ウタマロ

MUGEN
UTAMARO



永井豪と747ミッド77097737

AFTERNOON KC

MUGEN UTAMARO by GO NAGAI & DYNAMIC PRODUCTION

アフタヌーン
KC057

夢幻ウタマロ



MUGEN
UTAMARO

永井豪と

GO NAGAI &
DYNAMIC
PRODUCTION

講談社



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時は江戸

「美」を極めた鬼多川歌麿が、

艶やかな美女 紅蓮太夫と恋しい、

その情熱に燃れ尽きた時、

全ての崩落は始まった

狂わせていく!!

羅刹美と顔魔の

傑作サスペンス・ロマン!!

夢幻ウタマロ



永井豪と
9412197019737

MASUMI UEMURA
for the original
Illustration Production

TRANSLATED BY BOB
CLEGG & COMPANY
JANUARY 1973



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WUJEN STANDARD based on the novel
"The Picture of Dorian Gray" (Oscar Wilde)

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CHAPTER 1

THE
GRAND
HOTEL



AND TO
TRANSFER
THAT ONTO
PAPER
IS MY
PURPOSE!

IT EXISTS
WITHIN
EVERYTHING
AND
EVERYONE!

BEAUTY
IS THE
ESSENCE
OF THIS
WORLD!

BEAUTY!





HE LATER WENT ON TO BECOME A FAMOUS PRINT PUBLISHER, RENOWNED FOR PUBLISHING THE MOST FAMOUS NOVELS, POEMS AND UKIYO-E WOODBLOCK PRINTS OF THE DAY.

TSUTAYA JUZABUROU, A MERCHANT WHO FOUNDED A PUBLISHING HOUSE AT YOSHIMADA OF EDO IN AN'EI YEAR 1 (1772 A.D.)





FOR A WOMAN
IN THE
FOURTHARD
DISTRICT?

UNFO-4
PORTRAIT?



OR IF THE
BIRD MIGHT
NOT BE A
ZOMMA



IT ALMOST
MAKES ONE
WONDER IF THE
PAINTED
INSECTS WON'T
FLY OUT FROM
THE SHEET.

RITA,
YOU HAVE AN
UNUSUAL
TALENT TO
BRING LIFE TO
ANYTHING YOU
PAINT.



THAT ISN'T THAT
ENOUGH FOR YOU
ALREADY?



HA...

ANY BOOK
BECAUSE AN
INSTANT BEST-
SELLER IF IT
CONTAINS ONE
OF YOUR ILLUS-
TRATIONS.

JUST AS
IT WAS
FOR YOUR
"KNOX BRUSH
STAMP" OR
"WOMAN
PORE."



THAT'S WHY
TO LIVE FOR
YOU TO TRY
FOR. HAD
ON SOME
THINGS
A LITTLE
DIFFERENT.

YOUR
ILLUSTRATIONS
HAVE BEEN LI-
CENSED BY SOME
FASHION-BODIES
SO MUCH SO THAT
THEY'RE SELL-
ING THEM EVERY-
WHERE WITHOUT YOUR
HELP NOW.

AFTER ALL,
THIS IS A
BUSINESS
DEALING WITH
THE VERY
COMMODITY
OF HUMAN
DESIRE!!

OH, I'M AFRAID NOT.
TO BE IN THE
PUBLISHING
BUSINESS MEANS
CONSTANTLY
SCRAMBLING FOR
THAT NEXT
NEW HIT.



AND I HAVE
AN IDEA
WHAT YOU
REALLY WANT
TO DO IS
PORTRAITURE
OF BEAUTIFUL
WOMEN!



AND IT WAS DURING THIS
LITTLE PERIOD
OF 1740-1760
THAT VARIOUS
WOODBLOCK
PRINTING
TECHNIQUES
WOULD EMERGE
SIGNIFICANT
CHANGES, LED
BY INNOVATORS
SUCH AS SUZUKI
HARUNORO

FOR MANY
ARTISTS OF
THIS PERIOD
LIKE SUZUKI
HARUNORO OR
TORI
KYOOMORI, THE
TEND TO FAVOR
AND SUCCESS
WAS BLIND-BA
ITSELF

IN MY OPINION, THE
BLIND-BA SCENE
HADT CHANGED
MUCH SINCE SINCE
THE DAYS OF THE
TORI KYOUMORI

"BLIND-BA" LITERALLY MEANS "BLIND FOLK". IT REFERS TO A GROUP OF PORTRAITURES OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN IN KYOTO-K

7

SO
THAT'S
WHY
YOU'RE
ASKING
ME...?

HA

THAT'S WHY IT NEEDS
SOMEONE WITH A
FRESH PERSPECTIVE,
SOMEONE WHO
HASN'T SEEN FORMS
ONLY BLIND-BA...



TRUTH—AND,
OF COURSE,
YOU'VE
JOKED AROUND,
MY FRIEND!
WHAT I REALLY
WANT TO BEAM IS
BEAUTY ITSELF!
THE BEAUTY OF
THIS WORLD!

YOU MIGHT
THINK TELLING
ME TO BEAM
BEAUTIFUL
WOMEN MIGHT
BE A PERFECT
FIT FOR ME,



I'VE NO
INTEREST IN
WOMEN WHO
PLASTER ACT
KNOWS HOW
MUCH MAKEUP
ON THEIR
FACES!



BUT WHAT
I SEEK IS
Genuine
BEAUTY!
THE REAL
AND NATURAL
BEAUTY!



BUT IF YOU THINK
TRUE BEAUTY CANNOT
BE FOUND IN WOMEN
WHO USE MAKEUP,
I'M AFRAID YOU'D
BE A LITTLE MISTAKEN.

OH, I UNDERSTAND YOUR
FEELINGS WELL... I KNOW
HOW YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN
DEEPLY INTERESTED IN
THE NATURAL BEAUTY
EMBODIED BY TREES,
INSECTS, TREES, AND
FLOWERS.



ISN'T THAT
OBVIOUS?
TO TURN THE
HEARTS OF
MEN AND
EARN MONEY,
OF COURSE.

HOW DO YOU
THINK THOSE
HOUSES PUT
ON MAKEUP?

FROM THE
HIGHEST CLASS
COURTESANS TO
THE LOWEST CLASS
MAID-
SERVANTS AND
PROSTITUTES.



YES, BUT YOU SEE,
MAKEUP TO THOSE
MICHIO AND HIS
SPEARS, SWORDS,
AND HORSES ARE
TO A SAMURAI.

MAKEUP?

JUST AS A
WARRIOR
DOES HIS
ARMOR?

EXACTLY!
THEY PUT
ON MAKEUP
IN ORDER
TO MAKE A
LIVING, TO
SURVIVE!



ACCORDINGLY, THE
COURTESANS OF YOSHIWARA
APPOINTED WITH LAVISH
MAKEUP AND EXPENSIVE
KIMONOS WOULD BE
ANALOGOUS TO THE MOST
SKILLED AND HIGHEST
RANKING GENERALS
SERVING THE SHOGUNATE.
WHAT SAY YOU TO THAT...?



AND
THAT'S
NOT
ALL...



WELL
IF YOU PUT
IT THAT
WAY,
I SUPPOSE
YOU HAVE
A POINT.



AND SO, THE
EXTERNAL
BEAUTY YOU
LOOK FOR BEING
HOLLOW AND
FAKE, ARE IN
REALITY, AN
HONEST
REFLECTION
OF THEIR
SENSITIVE
AESTHETIC AND
DESIGNS!

SO TOO IS THE
ROLE OF MAKEUP
FOR THEM! IT IS
THEIR PRIMARY
MEANS OF
FULFILLING THEIR
DESIGNS IN THIS
MORTAL REALM!

JUST AS A
BRUSH IS A TOOL,
YOU ACHIEVE
YOUR DREAMS
AND GOALS WITH.



JUST AS YOUR
TECHNIQUES IN
CAPTURING BEAUTY
ON PAPER IS ART,
THEIR TECHNIQUES
IN REMAINING
UNMATCHED
PLEASURES CAN
ALSO BE CALLED AN
ART OF SORTS...!

SO YOU SEE,
YOU AND THEY
ARE NOT SO
DIFFERENT
AFTER ALL...

11



SO
THAT...

HAHA... SPOKEN
LIKE A TRUE
BUSINESSMAN
OF YOSHIMASA.
YOU'RE QUITE
THE PERSUASIVE
TALKER,
I ADMIT...

TO PRAISE
ONE WHILE TO
DISMISS THE
OTHER IS
CONTRADICTION,
IS IT
NOT...?



WELL,
YOU
SEE...



WHAT
WOULD
YOU
HAVE
ME
DO
EXACTLY?

12



MEN WHO LAY
EIGHTHON HER
HYSTERICALLY
INFATUATED!

A MOST
RARE
BEAUTY HAS
APPEARED IN
YOSHIMARU
I'VE NEVER
WITNESSED
SUCH FLAWLESS
BEAUTY IN ALL
MY LIFE
BEFORE!

SHE'S TRULY
A FLOWER
THAT
BLOSSOMS
ONCE EVERY
HUNDRED -
NAY, A
THOUSAND
YEARS!



13



*TANGS, HIGHEST-FLYING COURTESANS WHO USUALLY DEFEAT THE WISDEST SCHOLARS, WARRIORS AND FAMOUS





I'D
DEFEND
THE MAN
AND
FIGHTER
TWO
WELL
THAT
ATTITUDE
OF
BRAVERY

I SHOULD LIKE IT
VERY MUCH IF
I COULD BE DRAWN
AS BEAUTIFULLY AS
THIS BOY HERE.



AFTER ALL,
THE ONE
WHO WISHED
TO SEE YOU
WAS THIS
COMMON
TAMER
HIMSELF.

WE WOULD A
DRAWING, ONE
SO I COULD
BURY YOU
TO DEATH



YES, IT WAS
NEED
I SHOWED HER
A PICTURE OF
A BOY YOU
PAINTED

SHE
ASKED
FOR
ME?



OUR APOLOGIES
FOR KEEPING YOU
GENTLEMEN
WAITING. THE LADY
WILL BE HERE
SHORTLY NOW.

SO THAT'S AN
ADVANCE OF
MY WORK, IS
THE NOW...



DOOP EVERING TO
YOU ZENSON TAPPA!
THIS HERE IS
KITASAWA TOROAKI,
THE MASTER ARTIST.



WALL, OF COURSE,
OF COURSE,
THAT'S WHY
I BROUGHT
YOU HERE
TODAY,
AFTER ALL...

I... I'LL PAINT
YOU! TOUTA-
JUN! I'VE
MADE UP MY MIND!
PLEASE LET
ME DO HER
PORTRAIT!



18



YES,
THIS IS
EXACTLY
TAKES!

LET'S
SEE...

SO YOU'VE
FINISHED
THE
PAINTING AT
LAST AFTER
SOME
SLEEPLESS
NIGHTS...



HUP
HUP'S
THIS?

花菱 徳兵衛 印



I'VE DECIDED TO
GIVE UP ON THE
NAME TONYARD! TO
GO ALONG WITH
THE FACT I'M NOW
CHANGING MY LINE
OF WORK!

OH, YOU
MEAN MY SIGNA-
TURE?



AND I'LL BE
SPECIALIZING
IN BINN-GA TO
DRAW THE
TRUE NATURE
OF WOMEN
HIDDEN
UNDERNEATH
THEIR
MAKEUP AND
GARMENTS.

FROM TODAY
FORTH,
I'LL BE
KNOWN AS
KITAGAWA
UTAMARO!



HOLD ON
THERE,
RYOMA-JUN!
THIS PICTURE'S
NOT FOR SALE!



SAME THAT'S
HOW YOU FEEL.
I'LL BURY IT
AND GET THIS
PICTURE F-

31



WHY NOT?
IT'S A PITY
TO MEET
SUCH A
MAJAE-
LOUS PANTING
MISTRESS!

BUT THIS IS ONE
PANTING I COULD
SAVE TO YOU.

DON'T
WORRY, I'LL
BE PANTING
A LOT OF
FUM-SU
PANTS FOR
YOUR STORE
FROM NOW
ON



SAC...

IF YOU WANT FOR ME
TO CAPTURE THE
TRUE YOU, YOU'LL
HAVE TO BARE NO
SECRETS AND SHOW
EVERYTHING TO ME

WITH THE DEMON
TAMER AND
I WERE ALONE
ON THAT NIGHT.



THAT'S
BECAUSE
IT'S
ALMOST
700
GOON.



I FEEL
AS IF
I'VE
CAP-
TURED
THE
VERY
SOUL!

SHE
CONSENTED
TO EVERY
SIMPLE ONE
OF MY
REQUESTS...







I KNOW
IF THAT'S
HOW IT IS,
I WON'T
BUY ANY
PICTURES...

AS SUCH,
I FEEL THAT
THIS PAINTING
SHOULD
BELONG TO
NO ONE
OTHER THAN
THE SUBJECT
ITSELF!

EVERY CURSE OF
MY SKILL AND
EFFORT WENT INTO
CAPTURING THE
ESSENCE OF THIS
SINGLE SHEET OF
PAPER!



PAGE
PORTRAI-
TURES?

BUT YOU
KNOW,
THAT
PICTURE
JUST
GAVE ME
AN IDEA.



THAT
WAS
STILL
NOT
ENOUGH.

MOST OF
THE
SHUN-DA
HAVE SO
FAR BEEN
ONLY FULL-
BODY SHOTS.
THIS IS JUST
THE FIRST
PERSPECTIVE
I WAS
TALKING
ABOUT!

WHAT DO
YOU SAY,
RYUK?

I THINK YOU
SHOULD MAKE
THESE
FULL-PAGE
PORTRAITURES
THE TRADE-
MARK WORK OF
THE MURDER
LITURATED!



CERTAINLY,
AS YOU
SAID
SHUN-DA
TO DATE
HAVE ALWAYS
DEPICTED
THE
ENTIRE
BODY...







I'LL MEET IT
ALONG BY MY
SIDE FOR AS
LONG AS I
LIVE...

YES, YES,
THAT MAKES
ME HAPPY.
EVEN MORE
HAPPY. NOT
CAREING THIS
ONE WORK OF
ART THAT NO
ONE ELSE
HAS



I HEARD HIS
LATEST
WORKS OF
ART-AN
ARTIST'S
WORKS ARE
BEING VERY
WELL.

YES, MASTER
WATANABE IS
DOING THE
ARTIST.

I'M JUST SO
PLEASANT TO
OWN SUCH A
BEAUTIFUL
PICTURE!



TOURNAISON
OH, I DON'T NEED HIM
COMING AT ALL!
YES, LET HIM IN
AT ONCE.

HOW I KNOW IT IS
ENTERING EARLY IN
THE FRY, THE
BIG BIRD OUT
AND ALL, BUT
IT APPEARS
TOURNAISON WAS
GOING TO MEET
WITH YOU.



NO PLEASE BE
WIDE NOT TO
WASTE TOO
MUCH TIME
WITH YOU-
JAYSON!

YES, I UNDER-
STAND VERY
WELL. NOW GO
AND LET HIM
BRING.

AND, BUT I
WOULD LIKE TO
BEHOLD MYSELF
THAT THE LOSS
OF HISSELF I WAS
WASTING A
WASTING
TOURIST





HA, THAT'S
TAKING A
PICTURE OF
LIKE TO
SHOW YOU



OH MY,
HOW
TRULY
SOME.

YOU ARE THE
ONLY LIGHT
THING TWO
EYES CAN
HOW SEE...



I CAN SEE YOUR
VERY BEAUTY
GLAMOROUS FROM
THIS PAINTING!



IT'S... IT'S SO
GLAMOROUS...

WELL,
WHAT
DO YOU
THINK?



IT WAS
RYUGAKU
UTAMARO,
THE URBAN-
ARTIST.



WHO
WAS THE
ARTIST?



YOU
REALLY
THINK...

WELL, IT'S
CERTAINLY
BEAUTIFUL,
BUT I MUST
POUND IT
FLAT IN
COMPARISON
TO THE REAL,
LIVING
CRIMSON
TAYLOR!

THE MORE
BEAUTIFUL
THAN THIS
PANTHOO?



THE
OTA-
WARD?

YOU
MEAN...



YES, OF
COURSE!

OH NO,
WE CAN'T...
IT'S STILL
SO EARLY IN
THE DAY...

THERE'S
NOTHING
MORE
BEAUTIFUL
THAN YOU
IN THIS
WORLD!







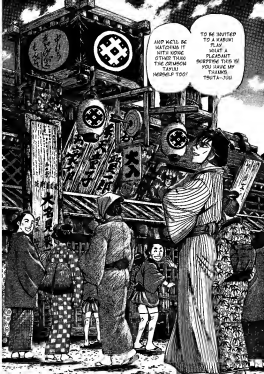
WANTER
KITASHAKA
THIS WAY!



YOU JUST WANT
TO SEE THE MAIN
ACTOR OF THIS
PLAY AND
THINK I'LL GO
PLACE BETTER
TO DO SO THAN
ENTRANCE.

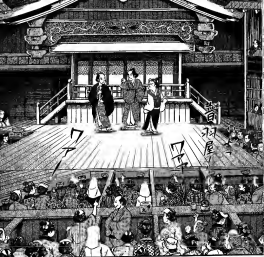
I'VE
PREPARED
SEATS IN
THE UPPER
LEVEL
FOR US.

WELL, IF IT'S
BECAUSE
THE CHANCE
TAKU
APPROACHES US,
I'LL GO TO
MEET HIM
OUTSIDE THE
ACTOR...



AND WE'LL BE
WATCHING IT
WITH YOU
OTHER THAN
THE CHANCE
TAKU
WONDER TOO!

TO BE INVITED
TO A KABUKI
PLAY
WHAT A
PLEASANT
SURRENDER THIS IS
YOU HAVE MY
THANKS
TSUKA-JOU



34



THIS IS
THE LAST
I COULD
DO.

AFTER HOW MANY
DO YOU KNOW
RECENT HIRA-DA
COLLECTION SOUP.



ON ITS
SOUTHERN?

TOOKA-DA!
I CAN'T
THANK YOU
ENOUGH FOR
SAVING ME
HERE
TODAY!



THESE KIDNAP ATTEMPTS ARE BECAUSING A FLURRY FOR CHANGING PLOTS.



35









BUT I'VE
ALREADY
MADE THIS
APPOINTMENT—
WANT TO
APPROVE!

H-HAAT?



OH, I'M AFRAID THE
CHIEF OF TARIKI HAS
DECLINED TO MEET
WITH YOU TODAY!



MAKING TO
STRESS OUT
NOT TO ME,
KIRISAKI
TOSHIKAZU!



NO!
THERE'S
NO WAY
SHE'D
SAY
SUCH A
THING!

BUT SO IT'S
BE BORN IN
YOU WOULD
CHANGE
YOURSELF...

SHE ALSO
WANTED YOU TO
KNOW IT'D BE
BETTER IF SHE
DID YOU DID
NOT WANT FOR
A WHILE.



AM, HAAT!
YOU
CAN'T
GO IN
THERE!

タタタ
タタタ
タタタ
タタタ
タタタ





OH, SO
YOU BLAME
ME FOR
YOUR FAILURE?

WILL
THAT
QUITE
DO?



I LOVE YOU
SO MUCH
I'VE EVEN
FORGOTTEN
MY PASSION
FOR ACTING!

EVERY SINGLE
SECOND I'M ASKING
OF SLEEP, MY
THOUGHTS ARE SO
LOST BY YOUR
BEAUTY I CAN'T
REMEMBER MY
LINES ANYMORE!



ARGH...



I PREFER
MEN AS
WORTH-
LESS AS
YOU!

AND EVEN IF
WHAT YOU SAY
IS TRUE, THAT
WOULD ONLY
MAKE YOU AN
UNTALENTED
ACTOR WHO
CAN'T EVEN
PERFORM
AFTER FALLING
TO LOVE!

NOW LEAVE
AND DON'T
BAGG
YOURSELF
IN FRONT
OF ME EVER
AGAIN!



I... I HAVE
NOTHING
LEFT...
NOTHING
AT ALL...

I'M A FAILURE
AS AN ACTOR
AND NOW EVEN
MY LOVE'S
ABANDONED
ME...

OH...

IT'S NOTHING AT ALL
LIKE MY OWN
BEAUTY, WHICH IS
AS LOVELY AS
UTAMARO'S
PAINTINGS...

THIS IS
WHAT YOU
RENDER
AFTER-
TAKING ME
IN FRONT
OF MASTER
UTAMARO!

HUH? AFTER
HOW MUCH I'VE
BEEN TO YOU,

YOU TURN
OUT TO BE
NOTHING
MORE THAN A
WORTHLESS
ACTRESS!

BUT YOUR
BEAUTY
TURNED
OUT TO BE
FOLLOW-

YOU
MAYBE
HAVE A
PRETTY
FACE,

AH!





44





THEN... DOES
THIS PICTURE
TURNING
USELY MEAN
MY SOUL
HAS BECOME
TAINTED...?



THIS
PICTURE IS
ONLY BEAU-
TIFUL
BECAUSE IT
CARRIES
WITH IT THE
VERY SAME
SOUL YOU
CARRY!

45



COULD YOU
PLEASE GO
FIND
TOUJUROU
AND BRING
HIM BACK!?

AS YOU
WISH,
MILADY...



I
SUPPOSE
I WAS A
LITTLE
TOO ALARMED
AND
NOT
WISE...



APP-
ROPRI-
THER?



RUN, LOOKS
LIKE IT
COMPLETELY
STOPPED
ZEMMS.

MY APOLOGUES
FOR BRUING YOU
TO A DREADED
PERFORMANCE
YESTERDAY.

IT'LL BE THE END
FOR THAT ACTOR
KINISAMA IF HE
CONTINUES TO
MESS UP THAT
BADLY!



BUT YOU
KNOW,
I DON'T
BLAME HIM
FOR FALLING
WORTHLESSLY
HEAD-OVER-
HEELS IN
LOVE WITH
THAT COMMON
TARD!

A REAL
REALITY
ONE OF



WASP WOULD
THE PEOPLE
GATHERED
AROUND
OVER THERE...?



IT SEEMS
THAT YOU-
JUROU HAS
COMMITTED
SUICIDE BY
HANGING
HIMSELF!

MILADY



MILADY!



I'VE
COMMITTED
A GRAVE SIN
I CAN NEVER
HOPE TO
RECTIFY!

WAS IT
MY
FAULT?
DID I
DRIVE
HIM TO
HIS
DEATH?

NO! IT
CAN'T
BE!

MILADY



ENOUGH ABOUT THAT STAMBO.



I HEAR THE CEMETERY TAYU HAS SENT HIMSELF AWAY TONIGHT AND IS RETURNING TO HIS ANKOR...



BUT THE THUNDER-CLOUDS CONTINUE TO RUMBLE. WHAT AN UNPLEASANT DAY IT IS TODAY...

THE RAIN STOPPED FOR AWHILE NOW,

I WONDER IF IT'LL START POURING AGAIN?



I MIGHT NOT KNOW WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED BETWEEN THEM TWO, BUT I DO PITY THE POOR LADY...



OH, I'M SURE SHE'LL BE FINE IN TIME. THEY SAY THE FATES OF LOVE ONLY FOLD BACK ONE'S SOUL...



IS THAT YOUR EXCUSE FOR PINKING TONIGHT?

LET'S HAVE A GLASS IN MORNINGS FOR THE RECENTLY DECEASED.



YES, AND
THEN MY
PAINTING OF
HER IS SURE
TO SHINE
BRIGHTER
THAN EVER!



HA, IS
THAT
HOW
BOYS
CRY
NOW?

IF THE COMMON
TAMU TRULY
SERVES OVER
HER LOVER'S
DEATH, I'M SURE
HER SOUL WILL
BECOME EVEN
MORE BEAUTIFUL
THAN BEFORE.





CHAPTER 1
THE DUMPY
GODDAM





THAT'S A
PRETTY
INTERESTING
PEEKING
YOU'RE
FABING
THERE



DO YOU
ALWAYS
DEAL
THIS
FAST?



WINE FOR A
MERE SECTON
YOU DEFENDED
BY GOD FAST
YOUR REVEN-
GEWORKS ARE



WHAT, NOT A
PROBLEM WITH
THAT? SO
WHAT IF MY
HANDS AREN'T
SLOW AS
SANDLOT?



WATER-
DRIVE



MORAL, IN
TURN
CREATED
A MORE
LIVING
BREATH-
ING
PICTURE!



THE FASTER
THE SOLVER-
WORK IS, THE
MORE FINE-
TUNE AND
VIVID THE
LIMBORN IS!



SHUT UP!
I NEVER
ASKED
YOU!

RESIDES,
I'M STILL
IN
TRAINING!

YOUR LIPS
HAVE
GROWN
THICKER
AND
JAWED
CUTTER
MOUTH, BUT
NOT MORE
TRAIT IT
WISDOM.

I SEE, BUT
THAT'S ALSO
CAUSING YOU TO
MAKE A LOT OF
MISTAKES.



HAH?

I ASSUME YOU'RE AN
ADVANTAGE OF
TRUTHS, BUT
YOU'RE NOT A
SETTER ONE THAN
MIST...

WHO THE
HELL
ARE YOU
IN THE
FIRST
PLACE?



YOU MEAN
YOU'RE THE
FAMOUS
UTAMARO?



I'M THINKING
OF HAVING
SOME STAFF
SOME FURTHER
FOR MY
STORE.

THIS YOUNG
MAN HERE IS
WATSUMI
DAIKOBU'S
NEPHEW,
UTAMARO.



HANA, MY HAP,
MY HAP I KNOW.
YOU'VE GOT A RIGHT
TO BEAT ME
CRITICALLY.

BUT JUST YOU WAIT!
I'LL GET BETTER AND
BETTER AND IN TIME,
I'LL BE THE ONE
TO LEAVE YOU
FLABBERGASTED!



MY HEART
STARTS
RACING
JUST FROM
LOOKING
AT YOU!

THE GIRLS
YOU DREAM
ARE IN A
WHOLE
NOTHING
LEAGUE FOR
YOU!

NEVER FELT
LIKE THAT
'BOUT A
PORTRAIT
BEFORE!



KATSUHAMA
SHUNSOU
YOUNGER THAN
UTAMARO BY 7
YEARS, HE WOULD
CHANGE HIS NAME,
AS WELL AS HIS
ART STYLE, MANY
TIMES DURING HIS
CAREER AS A WELL-
KNOWN ARTIST.

HIS HAIR BEARS
EVIDENCE: SCARS,
TATTO, BORN
ANYHOW, UNCLE,
BUT HE IS MOST
FAMOUSLY KNOWN AS
UTAMARO, THE
KATSUMURA MONSTER.





STANBRO, HAVE YOU
HEARD THE LATEST
RUMORS ABOUT THE
CRIMSON TAVOUP?



YES, SAN'S
STANDING IS
MORE ADVANCED
THAN BEFORE.

I HEAR
SAN'S MORE
POPULAR
THAN EVER
NOW...

AND THE
ELEMENTS SAN'S
ATTRACTING
AREN'T YOUR
NORMAL FOLK
EITHER THEY'RE
ALL STAMPS
OR FAMOUSLY
HEALTHY
MERCHANTS



IF THAT'S THE
CASE, MAYBE
I OUGHT TO
HAVE KEPT
THAT
PAINTING FOR
MYSELF
THO...



PERHAPS
NOT...

HAHA.

I SEE. THEN
I SUPPOSE SHE
WOULDN'T HAVE TIME
TO SEE POSS
POSS LIKE US
ANYMORE.

RUMOUR HAS IT
THAT AT THE
END OF EVERY
DAY, SHE SHUTS
HERSELF IN HER
ROOM ALONE TO
GAZE UPON HER
PAINTING...

WELL, I HEAR THAT
SHE STILL TAKES
GREAT CARE FOR
THAT PORTRAIT
YOU DREW HER.





IT LOOKS
DIFFERENT
EVERY TIME
I LOOK AT IT...



WHAT ON
EARTH IS
GOING
ON...?

BUT TODAY,
MY FACE
ONLY LOOKS
SLIGHTLY
TIRED OR
LONELY.



ON THE
NIGHT OF
TOUCHINOBU'S
DEATH, IT
CHANGED TO
A DEMON.

BUT... WHAT IF
THEY SEE WHAT
I SEE...? WHAT IF?

JUST
RELAX!

THEN PERHAPS
TO OTHERS, THE
PAINTING LOOKS
AS IT ALWAYS
DID.

NO, IT'S READY TO
TEAR. THE PAINTING'S
SHAKING. SAME.
I ONLY THINK IT LOOKS
DIFFERENT BECAUSE
MY JUDGMENT IS
COLoured BY
WHATEVER EMOTIONS
I FEEL. SAME! LOOK
AT IT...

THERE,
LOOK AT
THE
MIRROR
FOR HOW
YOU
REALLY
ARE!

ALRIGHT, JUST CALM
DOWN. YOU'RE THE
CRIMSON TANGU FOR
HUNDREDS OF YEARS. THE
SAME CRIMSON TANGU
AS ALWAYS, WITH
FEELINGS LOOKS AND
UNBLEACHED SOUL...

NO, I CAN'T
AFFORD TO
LET OTHERS
SEE THIS
PAINTING!

THERE'S NO WAY
TO SEE ALL THE
MAP TO THE
VERY DEPTH
OF MY HEART!

BUT THE QUESTION REMAINS...
WHY WAS MY PORTRAITURE
CHANGED...? THE MASTER
PAINTER KITABAMA UTAKARU
SAID HE CAPTURED MY BEAUTY
PERFECTLY SO WHY DID IT LOOK
SO HORRIBLY THAT NIGHT...?



HAVE
I GONE
MAD?

OR
COULD
IT BE...

SMALL THING
THAT ENDED UP
WITH A
MOST
UNNATURAL
SLAY...!

THAT HE
THOUGHT
SOME BOY
COULD THAT
MAY BE
WORTH TRYING
JUST A
PAINTER...!



THAT
STUSHOCK
OF HIS
SURPASSING
HUMAN
ABILITY!

THERE'S NO
WAY A MAN
LIKE HIM
COULD BE AN
ORDINARY
HUMAN!

YES, THAT
MUST BE IT!
IT HAD TO BE IT!

THOSE TERRIFY-
ING EYES OF
HIS... I COULD
REMEMBER
THEM FLASHING
BRIGHTENLY
DEEP WITHIN
MY SOUL...





HAIR
YOU'RE
IT IS

AND
ALL THE
WAY
BACK IN
KURAMA

AFTER ALL
YOU COME
HERE TO
SEE HER...

THOUGHTS
ABOUT THE
COMMON
TAKU ARE
A PLENTY



YES, THE BIG
PLACE IN THE
CENTER CALLED
TOURNAI

TOURNAI

THEY
SEEM-
CLASS
PLACE?

T-THAT'S
WHERE THE
VERY
COMMON
TAKU
MODER AT...



AND IT IS? YOU
THINK? ALL
THOSE
LADIES
FROM KURAMA ARE
A PLACE OF
CONCENTRATION

FROM IT, IT ONLY
I KNOW HE HAD
THAT LOANER?
I WOULD'VE
CHARGED HIM
A LOT MORE!

JUST LOOK HE
DIDN'T EVEN BRING
ANY SERVANTS OR
PEOPLE WITH HIM
EVEN THOUGH HE'S
GOING TO TOURNAI

AS THE HIGHEST-RANKING COURTESANS, THE TAYU DID NOT EASILY AGREE TO GRANTING A VISIT WITH A CUSTOMER.

ON THE FIRST VISIT, TALKING OR TOUCHING WAS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN AND THE CUSTOMER WOULD ONLY BE ALLOWED TO LOOK. ON THE SECOND VISIT, HE WOULD BE ALLOWED TO HAVE A CONVERSATION AND FINALLY ON THE THIRD VISIT, COULD HE BE GIVEN THE CHANCE TO SPEND A NIGHT WITH THE TAYU IF SHE COMPLIED.



CONSIDERING HOW EXTENSIVE SUCH A SINGLE VISIT WAS, THESE STRICT ETIQUETTES WERE THEN MADE TAYU ONLY AVAILABLE TO THE ELDEST CUSTOMERS.









HOW DO YOU
THINK I'M
NOT HAD A
SHIP I ASK?

I WAS
YOUR
FUGITIVE!

AND
YOU'RE NO
FUGITIVE
ANYMORE!

BUT YOU
SHOULDN'T
UNDERSTIMATE
THE INSTINCTS
OF A YONOSHITA
COUCHMAN
WHO'S AFTER-
TAKING ALL
KINDS OF WAYS
FOR HEADS



IT IS
ONLY BY
INSTINCTS
STAYING,



AND I
WISDOM

THE PEOPLE WHO
SAVE ABOUT THE
SHADOWS OF
SOCIETY, WHERE
LIFE WOULD NO
MEANING.



CONSIDERING
YONOSHITA IS A
DISTRICT
PROTECTED BY
THE
SHOGUNATE
ITSELF,

THERE'S ONLY
ONE KIND OF
PEOPLE WHO
WOULD BE
COULDN'T WOULD
GOVERN TO
THAT ITS
NAME

AND
TEXT
IS



REGARDS A METRON?

ARE YOU
A KOUR?



SEEMS THE
BEST
COURTESANS
HAVE A
SHARP
INTELL-GOT
TO MATCH
THEIR
BEAUTY.

MY, MY,
TO THINK
IT'D BE SOON
THROUGH SO
EASILY...



AS YOU'RE
JUST
FORGET,
YES, I AM
ONE OF
THOSE
PEOPLE.

NOTE: METRON - FROM THE JAPANESE, MEANS "MOTHER".
METRON - FROM THE JAPANESE, MEANS "MOTHER".



I'M A
METRON BY
THE NAME
OF KUROBA
SENDAI.

EVERY
AGAIN,
METRON!

WELL, THAT
ALREADY
CLEARS UP
A LOT OF
QUESTIONS.



WELL,

IS THAT
SURE -
ARE YOU
HAPPY
WITH
MET?



NOW THE
ONLY
QUESTION
REMAINS -
NO.



YOU SEE, MANY FARMERS ON THESE PEDESTAL VENTS TO AND CAN'T GET AROUND OF YOURS... ONE WANT WITH A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IS OFFER ENOUGH TO LOOSEN THEIR LIPS, IF YOU CATCH MY DRIFT...

FOR COME TO BRING A CERTAIN PAYOFF... IT'S A JOB THAT COULD BRING LIKE YOU WANT TO NOT TOO UNCOMFORTABLE

DO YOU WANT ME TO GIVE YOU THE DIRT ON ANY DAMNED WHO WANTS ME, IS THAT IT?



PERHAPS THROUGH A TRICK I COULD HELP YOU GET WITH THEM...

WHA...

IT'S A JOB LONG MORE SUITED TO HIGH RANKING COURTESANS THAN THE SECRET AGENTS I EMPLOY



TO PUT IT BLUNTLY, YES



YOU ARE ASKING ME COURTESANS OF ROOMS... HAVE ARE SOLEMN ONLY WITH MONEY, RIGHT?

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

NO
ONE IS
THIS
LADY?

TO SAY YOU'RE
IN LOVE TOO
THAT WOULD
BE ONE
DISASTROUS...

WHAT IS
I TOLD YOU
THAT WAS
A MAN
I HATED
KILLER?

THE
PAINTER,
KITABANA
UTAMARO!

木下尚江



I HAVE MANY
MULTIPLE XEROX
TO GIVE YOU
AND YET YOU
SEEM SO
HARD-SET ON A
SELF-MADE FOG...

RIGHT I AM
VERY FOG
ABOUT ON
PEAKING ME
LIKE THIS



WELL, Y'KNOW,
THAT'S MOST
OF THE WHOLE
POINT!
AND AND...
RIGHT, MASTER
UTAMARO??

EXACTLY









ALMOST
LIKE A
COUPLE—
BUT
DIFFERENT.

DO YOU SEE
THAT THOSE
MARKS—IF HE
WAS HEARTBROKE?



FOR A BARBER,
HE'S QUITE
STERLING.
BUT I SEE...

WELL...

EVEN A
SHAMISEN
STRAINED
YOU HERE?

LOOKS LIKE
YOU'RE THE
FAMOUS
GOW!



I DON'T
THINK I'VE
GIVEN A
COUPLE OF
HOURS IN
YOSHIMURA
AND HAVEN'T
HEARD OF HER.

THAT'S HER
NAME. HE'S
QUITE WELL
KNOWN,
ESPECIALLY IN
YOSHIMURA.

AM?



ALMOST AS
IF HE WERE A
MODEL IN
THE ADAM
FACED.

HE EVEN HAS NO
CHANCE OF
TAKING ALL THE
WAY UP TO THE
FOREMAN.



OH, YOU
DON'T KNOW
WHO THAT
WAS, MASTER
UTAMARO?

HE WAS ALSO
KNOWN FOR HIS
VARIOUS SATIRICAL
NOVELS AND
ESSAYS.

HIDAGA GOMMAI (1718-1779) :
PHARMACOLOGIST, SCHOLAR,
WRITER, AND INVENTOR.
WELL-KNOWN ESPECIALLY
FOR HIS EROKITERU, AN
ELECTROSTATIC GENERATOR,
WHICH ASTONISHED THE
JAPANESE PEOPLE OF
HIS TIME.



I DON'T
COME
HERE TO
FLIP
AROUND.

OF COURSE.

SO...
HELPING
SOME
STRAIGHT
GAY??



I HAD HEARD
HE WAS
GETTING THE
BOOKS...
BUT...

THAT'S
HIDAGA
GOMMAI?

TOO
STRONG
IF YOU
ASK ME.





I, KITASAWA
UTAMARO, AM
NOT THE TYPE
TO BE EASILY
SPOOKED BY
SOME
STALKER!

IF YOU'VE GOT
BUSINESS
WITH ME,
THEN SHOW
YOURSELF
ALREADY!









THAT

AN INEY
BOTTLE-IT IS
THAT ALL
WE'VE GOT AS
WEAPONS?

AND TWO
STUCKY
CASH!



SO RUN
AS FAST
AS YOU
CAN!

SOON GO
A...







I'LL KILL
HIM
WITHIN
3 DAYS
FOR
SURE!

Y-YES,
SIR!



BUT IF YOU FAIL TO
KILL HIM WITHIN
3 DAYS, I'M AFRAID
I'LL HAVE TO FORCE
YOU INTO EARLY
RETIREMENT...

Y-YES, I'M
SURE YOU
OBEY
MORRIS
CRAMER.



NOW
THAT...





BUT THE
REAL
QUESTION
IS WHY
I WAS
TARGETED

YUHA...



I HAD HEARD
THEY WERE NOW
A THING OF THE
PAST...

THAT
WAS A
REAL
SENJA,
NO
DOUBT...



TO THINK THEY'D
STILL BE LURKING
IN THE DARK... IT
SEEMS GPO STILL
HIDES MANY
SECRETS AND
CASTS MANY
SHADOWS...



THEY'LL
CONTINUE TO
COME AFTER
ME UNTIL
I'M DEAD

IF THAT
REALLY WAS A
SENJA, THEN
IT WON'T END
WITH JUST
THAT...



DAMN IT,
I CAN'T
THROW ON
A SINGLE
REASON
WHY!



HAVE, THIS
ISN'T THE
TIME FOR
THIS

















ARM!

KAT!

WAO
IS IT?

UNFORTUNATELY,
THAT'S NOT THE
HEAD OF THE MAN
YOU ASKED FOR.

MWA...

THAT MAN
IS OBVIOUSLY
PASTED
ELSEWHERE.
YOU WILL
CARE COME
A BIT OF
JAPANESE
DO MY JOB...

DO YOU
STILL WANT
FOR
UTAMARO'S
HEAD?

IS THAT
YOU,
AUTOMAT?

IT'S THE HEAD OF A
MAN WHO WORKED
FOR MANY YEARS
UNDER ME.

YOUR REQUEST IS
PROVEN TO BE
WORTH MORE
DIFFICULT THAN
I HAD ORIGINALLY
ANTICIPATED...



I DON'T CARE
HOW MANY OF YOUR MEN YOU
HAVE TO SACRIFICE!
A PROMISE IS
A PROMISE!

IF YOU WANT
ME TO ACT AS
YOUR SACRED
IMPORTANT
ON PAMAYON,

THEN YOU
WILL BRING
ME
UTAMARO'S
HEAD!







JUST WHAT
EXACTLY IS
WITH THAT
MAN...



NO BAY
CAGE...



THOSE SHARP REFLEXES,
PERFORMANCE, AND ABLE
FIGHTING STYLE

IT SEEMS NO
DISTRIBUTION IS IN
ORDER BEFORE
I CAN FULFILL THE
CRUSAD TANK'S TASK

CHAPTER 1
THE GROUND
TOWN





AMONG THE MANY SHOPS OF KOSHIMIZU, ONE PARTICULAR PLACE STANDS OUT ABOVE THE REST.



AND THE REASON FOR ITS EXCESSIVE POPULARITY WAS BECAUSE IT BOASTED THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MONK OF THE TOWN, THE CHIRONO TONIN.

THE NAME OF THIS POPULAR SHOP IS TOURIAN.



WITH HIM BEING JUST A COUNTRY BURNER AND ALL BUT...

YES, YES, I UNDERSTAND YOUR REASONS,



ABSOLUTELY NOT!

I REFUSE TO SPEAK A WORD WITH THAT MAN!



I STILL WON'T
CHANGE MY MIND!
I'VE SEEN THAT
MAN'S FACE AND
HE'S ABSOLUTELY
HORRIBLE!



BUT TO THINK OF HIM JUST
AS A COMMONER WOULD BE A
MISTAKE. HE'S REMINISCENT TO
BE A MODERN DAY VERSION
OF THAT FAMOUS MERCHANT
KNOWING A BUNZAMON
BACK LONG AGO...



THAT'S
A LITTLE
EARLY...

JUST THINKING OF HIM
MAKES MY SKIN CRAWL!
HOW COULD ANYBODY
SLEEP A NIGHT WITH
THAT MONSTER OF A
MARRY

HE LOOKS JUST
LIKE AN OLD
TOAD! THAT OLD
DINK, CREEPY
FORCED SMILE AND
THAT ANKLE
CROOKING HE
CALLS A VOICE...



IF YOU STILL
ADVANTAGE
BYING A REQUEST
AS SMALL AS THAT,
I'VE AFRAID OUR
STORE'S
REPUTATION WILL
SUFFER...



SO IF YOU AGREE TO
SEE HIM TONIGHT,
HE PROMISED HE'LL
BE GENTLY AND
MODERLY ADMIRE YOUR
BEAUTY FROM A FAR
DISTANCE...

IN ANY CASE,
HE UNDER-
STANDS THAT
YOU AND HE
ARE STILL
ONLY
STRANGERS.



ONE SUMOIE SAID
HE KEPT EVEN
TAKUMA OKITSUMI,
THE SENIOR
COUNSELLOR TO
THE TOKUGAWA
SHOGUNATE, IN
HIS POCKET WITH
GENEROUS BRISSES...

ZANOKUWA WAS A
LUMBER MERCHANT
WHO MONOPOLIZED
THE LUMBER TRADE.
IT WAS SAID HE
AMASSED HIS HUGE
FORTUNE FROM THE
VARIOUS FIRES THAT
PLAGUED EDO EVERY
YEAR.



HURRY! SO WHAT IF WE'VE GOT MONEY?
FROM MY EXPERIENCE, THE FASTER
THEY ARE, THE CHEAPER THEY ARE.
TOO. TO TURN A SHOP AS
ENTERTAIN AS OURS WOULD BE
FORCED TO RAISE THE PRICE.







AND YOU
THAT JOHNNY
SAYS ARE
A GOOD
REMARKABLE
BEAUTY.



I ADMIT I'M
GUTTY HORRIBLE
AND I HAVE NO
INTENTION OF
SAVING YOU
EVER THOUGH I'LL
FORGIVE.



BUT...
AS WITHOUT
I SAY NO,
I WILL APPROVE
BEAUTY.



ALL I ASK IS
FOR A
BLESSING
MIGHT BRING
WITH YOU

IN EXCHANGE
FOR ALL THIS
MONEY.





WOULD LIKE
TO BE
EMBRACED IN
YOUR WARM,
GOLDEN GLOW
AS WELL.

I, TOO,









HA! WHAT'S
THIS YOU'RE
DRIVING NOW,
WANTED
OF AMBROS?



BUT I HAVE TO
ADMIT, THE WAY
YOU DROD THE
AGOROS UNO IS
ACTUALLY BEING
ALRIGHT...

IT SEEMS TO
BE ONE THING
FRAMES



IT WAS
JUST
SOMETHING
THAT
POPPED UP
INTO MY
MIND ALL OF
A SUDDEN

OH,
THAT...

YES
YES

A TROP
WATERS
WITH A
AGOROS



BUT DOES
THE SOAP
TASTE
GOOD?

IS THAT'S
THE CASE,
I THINK IT'S
BE MOORE
INTERESTING
TO DEATH IT
IS AN
ACTUAL
TREATMENT!



WELL,
I HOPED
THE SOAP
TO BE THE
TRICKLE IN
THAT
PAINFUL...



WELL, MAYBE
NOT A SOAP
BUT
HE OCTOPUS
MIGHT BE
GOOD...

SPOTLIGHT
BABA,
I THINK,
IT SOUNDS
INTERESTING
TO ME!

THERE ARE SOME
EATING POTENTIALS
THAT YOU HAVE
THE NOT HAVE
IT HAVE
TO DEATH BACK A
SPOTLIGHT IMAGE

THAT?



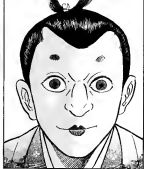
THE SOAP
LOOKS
VERY
GOOD
AND
THE
SOAP
TASTE
IS
GOOD...

IS THAT'S
THE CASE,
MAY DOB
TRY
TREATMENT
MAY?



IS THAT'S
THE CASE,
MAY DOB
TRY
TREATMENT
MAY?

BUT YOU KNOW,
I HADN'T BEEN
ABLE TO DEATH A
GOOD POTENTIAL
TREATMENT AS OF
LATE... MAYBE IT'S
BECAUSE I
HADN'T MET A
GOOD SUBJECT...









OH,
HMM?



I CAN'T
IMAGINE
THAT'D
ACTUALLY BE
SOMETHING
THAT YOU
COULDN'T
FEEL

REALLY?
JUST WHAT
EXACTLY
ARE YA
THINKING?



I'M FRANKLY
THAT ONE
OVERALL
TAKES
WITH THICK
MAKE UP
HEHHEH
MORAL



SO DON'T
LAUGH,
ALRIGHT?

WELL,
I'M JUST
DOING A
ROUGH
DRAFT,

NO ONE
I MEAN WHAT
YOU'RE
GETTING
TART

I ACTUALLY
THOUGHT
MYSELF
W'D MAKE FOR
A PRETTY INTER-
ESTING FRANKIE













IN ANY CASE,
THEY WERE
CERTAINLY A
PLEASURE TO
REMEMBER!

THAT NIGHT
I DREAMT
WITH HER

I SWEET I'LL
FORGET IT...



SQUEEZED ON
EVERY LAST
DUNGEON OF
MY VISCER
AND SPIRIT...

THAT DREAM-
LIKE NIGHT,

AND THAT'S
HOW I
MANAGED,

TO COMPLETE
THAT
MASTERPIECE!



THE MAN
DELIVERED

I SEE...
AND WHAT WAS
HER REACTION
TO THAT
PARITYSM?



A PORTENT
LIKE THAT
WOULD ONLY
BELONG TO
THE SUBJECT

I GAVE IT
TO THE
JEWELRY
TARIFF BOSS
OF COURSE.

TSUTARA
WAITED TO
MEET JONES
AND WELL,
IT WAS
DEFINITE



YOU COULD
ALMOST
SEE HER
NECK SOUL
CAPTURED
WITHIN IT.

I THOUGHT
THAT IT WAS
A GHOST.
POSSIBLY
AFTER
THAT.





JUST NOW
MYEY TALKED
ABOUT
THESE
SERVANTS
WITH
HIS
DEATH
WISHES...

THE
FAMOUS
CAPTURED
HE
RESEMBLES!



QUITE
ACCURATE,
BUT I MAY
KNOW
MYSELF

HE TROD ME
AS A CAPER-
TUNE OF A
DEMON...



AND MYEY
WAS ON
THE SCENE.



WAS
ACTING
ON THE
OUTSIDE.



IT'S QUITE
LIKELY MYEY
WAS IN THERE
WITH HIS
DEATH WISHES.

THOUGH IT
MAYBE THAT
THE MAN
WAS
QUITE AWARE
OF IT.

TO THINK HE COULD DRAW
SOMETHING LIKE THIS
WHILE SKETCHING
THOUGHTLESSLY...
WHAT TERRIFYING
DISTINCT AND PERCEPTION
HE POSSESSES!



MAYBE
I SHOULD JUST
CONTINUE TO
OBSERVE THE
SITUATION A
LITTLE LONGER



THAT'S ME
A HORSE
TOO...

BUT IF I DON'T
SELL HIM,
I CAN'T MAKE
USE OF THE
COMMON
TALENTS...



AND I AM
QUITE
SURE
ABOUT WHY
THE COMMON
TALENTS
WANTS HIM
DEAD AS
WELL...

I'LL HAVE TO
FIRST TEST IF
STAMARO CAN
REALLY BE OF
USE.



HE COULD BE
QUITE USEFUL
IN ANTICIPATING
DETACHMENTS
FOR US...

A GOOD
TALENT,
NEVER...

AND I'M SURE
TAKEMARU
OUTRAGED!
WOULD HE
BE PLACED AS
WELL...

HE'S FAR
TOO
VALUABLE
TO KILL...





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SEE THIS!
THE
POWER
OF MY
BEAUTY!



THERE'S
NOTHING TO BE
AFRAID OF EVEN
AS A WOMAN AS
LONG AS YOUR
BEAUTY CAN
CALL UPON THE
POWER OF
MONEY!

I TOOK HIM
FOR EVERY
LAST GOLD
PIECE HE HAD
TO OFFER!

OH OH OH!
THAT OLD TOAD
TURNED OUT TO
BE MY ANGEL OF
GOOD LUCK!



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COULD IT
BE...?



WAIT A
SECOND!



AND THAT'S
HOW I'VE
BEEN
MANAGING
TO STAY
PERFECTLY
BEAUTI-
FUL!



HAVE THIS
PAINTING OF
SOMEONE
RESEMBLING
ANY OF MY
UNLAMENTED
PLANS...?



A POPULAR COURTESAN
LIKE ME WHO
ENTERTAINS
MUCH GUESTS
CAN NOT
NEARLY
IMAGINE
POSSIBLE
RETAIN OUR
BEAUTY FOR
LONG...

IT IS QUITE
STRANGE
NOW THAT
I THINK
ABOUT IT...

IS IT REALLY
ALL BECAUSE
OF THIS
PAINTING??



IF THAT'S THE
CASE, THEN
IT'S CRUCIAL
TO READ IT
PERFECTLY
PREPARED?

BUT IT'S
STARTING TO
BECOME SO
NERVOUS I CAN'T
EVEN LOOK AT
IT FOR LONG...



AND IF
I CONTINUE
LOOKING AT THIS
DANGEROUS THING,
I'LL END UP
LOSING MY
MIND...

THIS
PASTIME'S
MADE ALL
STUFFS
FROM THAT
PAINTER
STANDARD

THAT'S
WHY...



OH
DEAR,
WHAT
TO DO

NOT ONLY
THAT,
I CAN'T
LET
ANYBODY
SEE IT
EITHER...



I'LL
KILL
HIM!

NO
NO
NO
NO
NO
NO
NO

I WON'T
EVEN NEED
TO ASK FOR
THAT SPY'S
HELP
ANYMORE!

IF I CAN KILL
KITAGAKI
ITAMARO,
MAYBE I CAN
PUT AN END
TO HIS
VOODOO
CURSE ON
THIS
PAINTING!

I ALREADY
HAVE ENOUGH
MONEY AS IT
IS, WHICH
I CAN EASILY
USE TO KILL
HIM



CHAPTER 4
APOLLAGO
IN THE
LIGHT





HOW WAS
MAY? WAS
HE BETTER
THAN MAY?

I HEAR YOU
PLAYED
AROUND WITH
SOME FELLOW
WITH A
PRETTY FACE.



I'M FAR MORE
ATTRACTIVE THAN
HE IS WITH MY
GOLDEN ALIANCE!
HAE HAE HAE!

HEHE,
GOOD,
GOOD...

OH, THAT
COUNTRY
BUSINESS
WAS ONLY
THE DARING
OF SOME
HIGH
PROVINCE
MAY
NOTHING
COMPARED
TO YOU!











YOU SAID THAT'S
ALREADY HOW
SOME LOCAL
RESEMBLED
ME. AS YOUR NEW
SUBJECT?



DOES ANYONE
THE RESEMBLANCE
THAT. JUST A
LITTLE MORE
I HAVE TO
APPEAR TO
FEEL ...

IS SHE THAT
WAS LAST
TIME.



AND FATHER MUST BE
JUST A DOGE, BUT HE'S
ALSO THE SELECTED
SUBSTITUTION OF THE
LOCAL WARDEN DOGS!
AND HE DIDN'T
FATHERED THEM
THROUGH AND
THROUGH!

IT WAS OUTSIDE
DOGS! BUT YOU
KNOW AND HE
KNOW A LOT
MORE, IT'S
WASN'T HIS
TROUBLE,
YOU KNOW!

IT'S TRUE,
IT'S TRUE. BUT
DON'T WORRY,
I'LL KEEP IT A
SECRET FOR
NOW!



HE
WASN'T
ME IF
I COULD
FEEL
AND
FEEL
TOO.

WASN'T MY
END, IT WAS
MINE!

NO,
BUT ...





WHY CAN'T I SEE HIM LIKE THIS?

WHAT? JUST WHAT'S WRONG WITH WHAT I HEARD?

HE ALSO SAID YOU'LL NEED MUCH BETTER CLOTHES FOR THE MEETING.



NOW IF IT WERE THE SPRING TOWN, I'D MEET WITH HIM AT ONCE...



HA...

HE KNOWS YOU'D RESPOND LIKE THIS.

WHICH IS WHY HE WANTED ME TO GO NOT SAY



IN ANY CASE, I DIDN'T SEE HIM LIKE MEETING WITH THIS WOMAN.

WELL? THAT MEANS TURNING OUT TO BE EVEN MORE FOLLY BY THE SECOND...



IS SOME
OTHER
THAN THE
SOUL
TAMURA
OUTCAST?



THAT WOUL
NOT
BECAUSE THE
MAN IS
QUESTIO

DURING THE REIGN OF THE
9TH AND 10TH TONUGAWA
SHOGUNS, YOSHIE AND
YOSHII, HE QUICKLY RODE IN
BANK FROM A KATAMOTO
WITH 600 KORO IN YEARLY
PAY TO BECOME THE DAIBYO
OF SASAGA-JUN WITH 97,000
KORO IN YEARLY PAY. HE ALSO
SERVED AS A ROJU AT THIS
TIME, DURING WHICH HE WAS
ESSENTIALLY THE DE FACTO
RULER OF THE SHOGUN
GOVERNMENT.

TAMURA ONTOMKI
BORN IN KYOHO YEAR 4
(1779A.D.) AS THE
OLDEST SON OF
TAMURA MOTOKIYO,
A MINOR KATAMOTO.



SOUL HIGASHI - SHOGUN GOVERNMENT POST, BELOW ONLY IN TASK TO THE SHOGUN, WHOM THEY SERVED
KATAMOTO - UPPER-TAMURA KATAMOTO MEMBERS OF THE SHOGUN, IN CONTRAST TO THE LOWER SHOGUN GOVERNMENT



WHAT
WHAT
YOU
SAY?

UTA-
MADOT?



UTAH
MADOT?

THE
TAMARA
IT



WHAT REASON
WOULD I HAVE
TO MEET
WITH A MAN
AS IMPORTANT
AS HIM?



FIGHT, FIGHT.
MY HEART'S FLY
TOWARD THE
BLISS OF AN END?

TO REDEM
TAMARA IS
EQUVALENT
TO TREASON?

THERE IS
CRUCIALLY
COMES—
THAT
YOU CAN'T
JUST SAY
NO TO!

GOOD... NOW THAT
WE'VE AGREED ON
THAT, YOU'LL NEED
TO HAVE TIME
APPROPRIATE
ATTIRE FOR THE
MEETING.

FINE,
I'LL MEET
HIM, I'LL
MEET HIM.

I DON'T
REALLY
HAVE
ANYTHING
OTHER
THAN THIS
THOUGH.



I'M BEING SERIOUS HERE!
IF HE WERE TO TAKE
OFFENSE IN ANY WAY,
WHO KNOWS WHAT SORT
OF PUNISHMENT ALL OF
US WILL BE CHARGED
WITH?



NO WAY IN
HELL I'M
SPORTING
THAT
SHARP
HAIR-LOOK!

NOOO!
I LIKE MY
HAIR AS IT
IS RIGHT
NOW!

THAT'S
OUT OF
THE
QUESTION!

!?

I CAN LAST YOU
A GOOD CHARGED,
THAT'S NO
PROBLEM THE
REAL PROBLEM
IS YOUR HAIR
YOU'LL NEED
TO GET IT OUT.









YAMABRA
SOPHISTICATED
LEADER,
YAMABRA
DETROIT

A
PLEASURE
TO MEET
YOU AT
LAST,



NOW COULD
I HAVE NOT
HEARD OF
THE WOMAN
WHO'S BEEN
THE TALK OF
YOSHIMURA
FOR SO LONG?

OF
COURSE

I PROMISE
YOU WE
WILL OF
ME YES?

I AM THE
GROOM
TAYO.





UGH...



DAMMIT,
I KNEW
THIS HAIR
STYLE'S
NO GOOD
ON ME!

IT FEELS
UNPLEASANT
HAVING THE
RAINDROPS FALL
ON MY BALD
TOP...



THEN
NAME
YOUR
PRIZE!

BECAUSE
I WANT
THE
UKYO-E
PAINTER
KITABANA
UTAMARO
SENT TO
HIS
GRAVE!







MAKING THE
BAGGAGE A
LITTLE TOO
WELL—
WISHING
THESE
DAYS...

THANKS, BUT
I GOT MY
HANDS FULL.



I WANT
NOT HAVE
A CLASH
BUT
THANKS
NO WAY
TO WANT
TO GET
INVOLVED
WITH THE
LIVES OF
THEM.

BUT WHAT
WOULD
THE
FAMILY
WANT
WITH ME?



FIRST, A BOUL.
AND NOW, THE
FAMILY.
I DON'T WANT
TO MESS WITH
EITHER OF
THEM.

YES, WHAT
BOTTOM
LACK...





IS THAT
ANNOY
I SEE IN
YOUR
EYES...?



THERE'S SOME-
THING
I'D LIKE
TO ASK
FIRST
BEFORE
ANY-
THING

I AM THE
WOLF
TAKUMA
OTOMOTO



SO, IT SEEMS
YOU NEED A
THUMB AFTER
ALL. JUST
LOOK AT HOW
I FEEL.

WHO TOLD
UTAMARO TO
CUT HIS
HAIR? HAS IT
YOU, ANNOY?



I HEARD
YOU
WANTED
TO HANG
WITH ME
SO I HAD
NO
CHOICE
TO GET
MY HAIR
CUT!

ALRIGHT,
SINCE YOU
ASSED,
I'LL
BE
AS WELL
ANNOY!



WHAT?

EVERYONE
HAS THEIR
OWN SCENE
OF AD-
THINGS,
YOU KNOW!

IT SHOULD BE
A MAN'S
CHOICE
WHETHER OR
NOT HE WANTS
HIS HAIR LONG
OR SHORT!



AND NO, IT
LAME TO SAY
IF HE'D BE
WILLING TO
COOPERATE
WITH THE
GOVERN-
MENT."

ACCORDING TO
DEKKA, YOU'VE
GOT QUIT A TIME
AND FOR THAT,
WHICH IS
REFLECTED IN
YOUR FATHER'S...

YOU SEE, I DEAL WITH
ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE
IN MY WORK.
JAPANESE AND IT'S
NECESSARY TO HAVE
A GOOD EYE FOR
JAPANESE PEOPLE.

W-WHAT, YOU
DON'T
ACTUALLY SAY
NO TO HIM,
DO YOU?
PLEASE TELL
ME HOW
DIFFICULT

...THAT'S WHAT HE
SEEMED TO SAY.
SO I TOLD HIM I'VE
GOT NO DEAL
WITHOUT HEARING
FROM YOUR
HONORABLE
HOMER.

AND HE
ACCEPTED,
HEH HEH.

I AGREE FOR
HIS APPRO-
PRIATE TO
ALLOWING ME
TO BEAN
FATHERS OF
ANY BEAUTI-
FUL LADIES
RELATING
TO THE
COURTLY.

OH, GOOD
SO... WHAT
WAS YOUR
CONCLUSION?

WELL, I FINALLY
WENT TO SAY THAT,
WHICH IS WHY
I JOINED UP
ACCEPTING NO
OTHER, BUT ON
ONE CONDITION.



WHO
KNOWS

SO ARE YOU
SAYING THAT
THE SHINOBU
THAT HE'S
EARLY ENOUGH
BY SOMEONE
ISN'T?



THERE WERE NO
SIGNS OF ANY
EXTRAORDINARY
OR POTENTIAL
THINGS DISPLAYED
IN HIS
RESIDENCE.

IN ANY CASE, THAT
WAS A LOT
MORE MODEST
THAN THE
SHINOBU WERE
HEARD TO BE



SO THERE
WENT HE
SOME
SOMEONE
THAT
SHOULD

AS THEY
SAY,
WHERE
THAT'S
SOMEONE,
THAT
MUST BE
THE



I WISH I COULD
SEE THE NAME
BUT I DON'T
FEEL THAT I'M
REALLY
WORTHY OF
THE NAME...

WELL, I'M JUST
GLAD YOU
WENT TO
SOMEONE
WORTHY
WITH THE NAME...





JUST WHAT IS
IT YOU WANT??
I DON'T RECALL
EVER DOING SOME-
THING TO
EARN THE
LOCAL YAKUZA'S
HEATH!



I DIDN'T
KNOW WHO
THEY WERE
SO I
STUPIDLY
TOLD THEM
WHERE YOU
LIVED WHEN
THEY ASKED
ME!

SORRY,
IT'S ALL
MY FAULT!



WHAT?

AMAHHAH!
I DON'T THINK
I'VE EVER
SEEN SUCH
SPINELESS
KAMUZAS
BEFORE!

WHAT A
PARCA!



WELL IF
I KNOW!
ALL THAT
MATTERS TO
US IS THAT
WE GET PAID
IF WE KILL
YOU!



HOW IF
YOU DON'T
WANT
YOU'LL
QUICKLY
HAND
OVER
YOUR
LIFE!



AM I
THAT
TERRIFY-
ING?

ALL FM
HOLDING IS
THIS BOX OF
LEFTOVER
SUSHI!

NOT ONLY ARE
THERE 3 OF YOU
AND ONLY ONE
OF ME, BUT
YOU'RE ALSO
ARMED WITH
SHOGUN! AND
EVEN THEN YOU
HAVE TO TAKE
SOME WOMAN
AND BOY AS
HOSTAGES. ALL
IN ORDER TO
KILL ME!



WHY
YOU
...!

WHAT?!

I WON'T RUN
OR HIDE SO
AS LONG AS
YOU THREE
HAVE GOT
THE BALLS,
I'LL GLADLY
TAKE YOU
ON!

HOW ABOUT
YOU LET GO
OF THE
MOLKIN' AND
KID WHO'VE
GOT NOTHING
TO DO WITH
THIS?

BUT WE'LL DO
IT OUTSIDE
SINCE IT'S
TOO CRAMPED
IN HERE!









WHO THE
HELL DO
YOU THINK
YOU ARE!?



GYAA!

THANKS
FOR THE
HELP!

SON
OF
A...!





THESE WERE
JUST A FEW
SMALL ONES.



YOU
SAID...?



...NOW THAT
I'VE HEARD YOU'LL
STILL BEAR DOWN
AGAIN THE
NEXT TIME?

I ONLY SENT
THEM OUT TO
TEST HIM.



BECAUSE NEXT
TIME, I'LL BE
BEATING DOWN
THE ENTIRE
NEIGHBOURHOOD
BECAUSE HE
LIVED UP!

YES, BUT I WON'T
HOLD BACK FROM
DISCIPLINING DISRUPTIVE
PEOPLE IF
I HAVE TO...



EXCELLENT!
THE MORE
HIS FRIENDS
AND NEIGH-
BOURS ARE
INVOLVED,
THE MORE
HE'LL
SUFFER!

MAKE THAT
MAN SUFFER
ALL THE
WAY TO
THE FIERY
DEPTHS
OF HELL!



CHAPTER 8
FANTASTICAL
LANDS









SANZU, DON'T BE
IMBECILICALLY.

IN ANY CASE, I THINK
YOU CAN AT LEAST
RELAX FOR TONIGHT.

.....

AND YOU
STILL
HAVEN'T
PARTICIPATED
IN
PORTNIGHT
YET...



OUR TARGET MIGHT
BE A PAINTER BUT
DON'T UNDERESTI-
MATE HIM! THERE'S
ALSO A SKILLED
DOWN HELPING HIM
SO KEEP AN EYE
OUT, Y'HEAR?

NO MATTER THE
JOY, THE WORK OF
VANDALISM CAN
ALWAYS CARRY IT
OUT AS LONG AS
THE FORCE IS
GREAT!







TOMORROW,
THE PAINTER
THAT MADE
THE GROUND
TAPPOU OF
YOSHIMASA
DUPPER
WILL DIE!



PERISH
AMIDST THE
BLAZING
FLAMES,
KITAGAWA
UTAMARO!

AHAHAHA!

YOUR CURSE
WILL END
ALONG WITH
YOUR LIFE!

AT LAST,
I CAN SAY
GOODBYE
TO THIS
WRETCHED
BEAST!









YOU
DON'T
HESITATE
TO TELL
ME!

FATHER!
THIS IS NO
INTERNAL
AFFAIR!



!?



THEY MUST BE PLANNING
TO KILL EVERYONE IN THIS
MEMBERSHIP UNDER
THE PRETEXT THAT THEY
DIED IN THE FIRE!

THIS IS WAR, SAKURA!



I JUST DON'T
EXPECT THEM
TO MAKE
THEIR NEXT
MOVE SO
SOON!

IT'S
PROBABLY
THOSE
YAKUZA
COMING
AFTER
UTAMARO!



THE MAN
DRESSED
AS A
SAMURAI!
THE
PRETEXT TO FIGHT!

MY
FATHER!

IT'S KILL OR
BE KILLED!









I'LL SEND
YOU
DEMONS
TO HELL
WHERE YOU
RIGHTLY
BELONG!

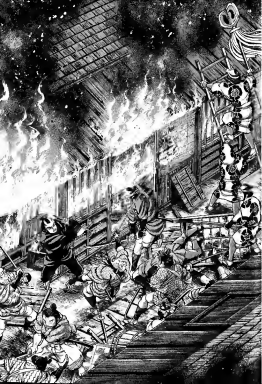
YOU DARE SET FIRE
TO THIS WHOLE
NEIGHBOURHOOD
JUST TO KILL ME?
YOUR TRANSGRES-
SIONS HAVE GONE
FAR BEYOND WHAT'S
ACCEPTABLE FOR
HUMANS!



HA,
I'D
LIKE
TO
SEE
YOU
TR-













UGH... IF I KNEW...
YOU WERE THIS
STRONG... I WOULD'VE
TURNED DOWN THAT
WOMAN... NO MATTER
HOW PRETTY SHE
WAS...



WHO
ORDERED
YOU?



COUGH
IT UP!
YOU'RE THE
BOSS,
AREN'T
YOU? WHO
PUT A HIT
ON ME?





BUT
WHY??

CRIMSON?
THE
CRIMSON
TAPU?!



EDDIE'S FIGHTERS
ARE THE BEST!

EDDIE'S FIGHTERS
ARE THE BEST!

EDDIE'S FIGHTERS
ARE THE BEST!

NOW THIS I
GOTTA SEE!
EDDIE'S FIGHTERS
ARE THE BEST OF
THE BEST!



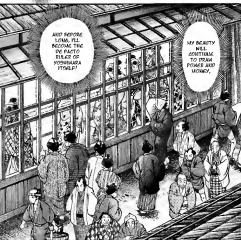


THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR IN THIS WORLD ANYMORE!

MYE
UTTERED
AND HIS
JURIED
PANTHEM
GONE.



YAKA



AND BEFORE
LONG, I'LL
RECOVER THE
THE FACTS
DEAR OF
YOURSELF
ITSELF!

MY BEAUTY
WILL
CONTINUE
TO DRAW
POWER AND
MONEY,



THE
PAINING... IT'S
EVEN MORE
HORRIBLE THAN
BEFORE! WHY
WOULD IT
REVERT TO
NORMAL EVEN
AFTER ITS
PAINER HAS
DIED?



UNLESS...
COULD IT
BE THAT
UTAMARO
STILL
HASN'T
DIED...!?





JUST WHY
DO YOU
WANT ME
DEAD,
COMEDY
TAMUSHI?

THAT'S
EXACTLY
RIGHT!





NOT
WHAT DID
I EVER DO
TO YOU?

IT'S ALL
BECAUSE
OF YOU!
YOU DID
THIS TO
ME!

IT'S
NOT
MY FAULT!



DO YOU
HAVE ANY
IDEA HOW
MUCH
YOU'VE
TORTURED
ME WITH
THAT
THING?

YOU FAINTED
ME! IT'S
THAT CURSED
PAINTING OF
YOURS!



SEE THIS
GROTESQUE
PAINTING
YOU'VE
CURSED WITH
THE FOULEST
OF BLACK
MAGIC!

SEE FOR
YOURSELF!





WHAT HAPPENED
TO THAT PURE
AND RADIANT
BEAUTY
I WITNESSED
BACK THEN?

WOOF IT IS
YOU WHO'VE
CHANGED!
WHY NOT
THAT SAME
BEAUTIFUL
ORANGE TANKI
I PAINTED
THAT NIGHT?

NO ONE
COULD BEAR
LOOKING
AT THAT
PAINTING
FOR LONG!

WHAT MOUNTAIN
ARE YOU
SPEAKING OF?
YOU SEE JUST
HOW BEAUTIFUL
THESE MOUNTAINS
ARE! THAT
PAINTING IS?

WHAT!?

SO, THE
PAINTING IS
PERFECTLY
FINE.
THE REAL
PROBLEM
IS...

JUST WHAT
HAVE YOU
DONE TO
YOURSELF?

YOU DARE
CALL ME,
THE
CRIMSON
TAKUJI, THE
MOST
BEAUTIFUL
WOMAN OF
OUR TIMES
A GHASTLY
DEMON?

Y-YOU...

ALL I CAN
SEE IS SOME
GHASTLY
DEMON
SITTING IN
FRONT OF
ME!









AND DO YOU
KNOW WHY
I TERRIBLY
HATED
MYSELF
PASTING
SINCE THEN?



IT HAD TO EARN
ENOUGH MONEY
TO MEET YOU
AGAIN

BUT... MAKING A
TAMU, WHICH LEADS
THE CHINSHU
TAMU, IS FAR TOO
EXPENSIVE FOR AN
ORDINARY MAN
LIKE ME...



AND WHEN THAT
PAY CAME,
I WOULD USE
THE MONEY
I HAD SAVED UP
TO BUY YOUR
FREEDOM!

AND SO I
CHANGED MY
GOAL... I FINISHED
THE PAY WOULD
EVENTUALLY
COME WHEN
EVEN YOU, THE
CHINSHU TAMU,
WOULD BE DOING
WORKING AS A
COURTESAN



THE FLAWLESS
BEAUTY WHOSE
VERY SOUL
RADIATED OUR
FROM HER AS A
PURE AND
DAZZLING LIGHT!

IT'S THE
CRIMSON
TAMU I
PAINTED
THAT
NIGHT!



IS NOT
THE
CRIMSON
TAMU I
PAINTED
THAT
NIGHT!

BUT THE
WOMAN
I FAIL TO
LOVE WITH...





NO MATTER HOW
OLD OR WRINKLED
YOU MAY BE BY
THEN, I SWEAR I'LL
COME FOR YOU!

I PROMISE
I'LL COME
FOR YOU
IF YOU DO.

AND
RETURN
TO HOW
YOU WERE
HERE...

BECAUSE
THE BEAUTY
KITAGAWA
UTAMARO
SEES IS THE
BEAUTY OF
THE SOUL
ITSELF!





THEN
THERE'S
ONLY ONE
THING LEFT
TO DO!

I'LL
DESTROY
THIS
PAINTING!

DIE YOU
NEEDED
MUCH
OF MYSELF!

DIE!



THEY FOUND A
CORPSE OF A
WOMAN, WITH A
KNIFE PLUNGED
THROUGH HER
HEART. SHE WAS
WITHERED,
WRINKLED, AND
LOATHSOME OF
VISAGE.

WHEN THEY
ENTERED,

LIVING BESIDE HER WAS
A SLEND PORTAIT OF
THE JOHNSON TAYOU AS
THEY HAD LAST SAW
HER, IN ALL THE
WONDER OF HER
EXQUISITE YOUTH
AND BEAUTY...

"WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY DRAWING SOMETHING BASED ON A CLASSIC WESTERN NOVEL?" THAT WAS THE SUGGESTION GIVEN TO ME BY THE EDITORS OF AFTERNOON MAGAZINE DURING OUR MEETING AT A SUSHI RESTAURANT LOCATED QUITE CLOSE TO MY COMPANY, DYNAMIC PRODUCTIONS. WITH THE ALCOHOL INFLUENCING MY BRAIN, I QUICKLY BLURTED OUT, "CLASSIC WESTERN NOVEL? SURE, SOUNDS GREAT!"

"SHAKESPEARE OBVIOUSLY COMES TO MIND WHEN THINKING ABOUT CLASSIC LITERATURE. HIS FOUR GREAT TRAGEDIES, OTHELLO, MACBETH, HAMLET, KING LEAR, WOULD ALL BE GOOD TO GO. THEN AGAIN, THEY'VE ALL BEEN ADAPTED SO MANY TIMES, EVEN BY AKIRA KUROSAWA..."

AS WE KEPT ON BRAINSTORMING A LIST OF POSSIBLE WORKS, I COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL RATHER LUKEWARM ABOUT ALL OF THEM, AND SO THE MEETING ENDED WITHOUT A SPECIFIC TITLE CHOSEN.

FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS, I CONTINUED TO RACK MY BRAIN ON THIS PROBLEM. BUT NONE OF THE NOVELS I THOUGHT OF COULD GIVE ME THAT FEELING OF, "AHH! THIS IS IT!"

FINALLY, ONE DAY WHILE MY WIFE AND I WERE DRIVING OUT TO A GOLFING RANGE, MY WIFE ASKED ME, "WHAT'RE YOU THINKING SO DEEPLY ABOUT?" REMEMBERING THAT MY WIFE HAD BEEN AN ENGLISH LITERATURE MAJOR BACK IN UNIVERSITY, I ASKED HER IF SHE HAD ANY GOOD SUGGESTIONS.

"HMM... HOW ABOUT DICKENS?"

"I DON'T KNOW... SOMETHING LIKE OLIVER TWIST, A CHRISTMAS CAROL, OR DAVID COPPERFIELD ALL SEEM FAR TOO WELL-KNOWN TO HAVE A FRESH ENOUGH FEELING. AND THEN THERE'S A TALE OF TWO CITIES, WHICH ISN'T QUITE WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR..."

IT WAS THEN WHEN I ENTERED THE HIGHWAY AND CHANGED DRIVING LANES, MY WIFE SUDDENLY YELLED, "OSCAR WILDE!" TO THAT, I IMMEDIATELY YELLED BACK, "DORIAN GRAY!"

I SUPPOSE MORE PEOPLE MIGHT KNOW WILDE FOR THE HAPPY PRINCE, BUT TO ME, I PRIMARILY KNEW HIM FOR THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY. I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER LISTENING TO THE CLIMAX OF THAT NOVEL IN A RADIO DRAMA BACK IN MY CHILDHOOD AND IT LEFT QUITE AN IMPRESSION ON MY BROTHER AND I.

"IT'S GOT SUPERNATURAL AND FANTASY ELEMENTS SO TO SPEAK. IT'S RIGHT UP YOUR ALLEY. EVEN OSCAR WILDE HIMSELF WAS QUITE THE CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE LIKE YOURSELF..."

LATER WHEN I TOLD THE EDITOR, HE REPLIED, "OSCAR WILDE, HUH? SOUNDS INTERESTING." I TOLD HIM TO GET BACK TO HIM WITH MORE DETAILS ONCE I LOOKED OVER THE SOURCE MATERIAL AGAIN.

AND SO I QUICKLY PURCHASED AND READ THE BOOK. IT WAS A LITTLE MORE PLAN THAN I HAD ORIGINALLY REMEMBERED IT. THE PLOT IS AS FOLLOWS: AN ARTIST WHO FALLS IN LOVE WITH THE BEAUTIFUL DORIAN GRAY PAINTS A MARVELOUS PORTRAIT OF HIM. WHILE THE REAL DORIAN GRAY NEVER AGES AND MAINTAINS HIS YOUTH AND BEAUTY, THE PORTRAIT GROWS OLD AND UGLY WHENEVER HE SINS. IN THE END, THE PORTRAIT PROVES TO BE TOO MUCH FOR HIM, AND HE DRIVES A KNIFE THROUGH IT. THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE PEOPLE FIND A CORPSE OF A HORRIBLE MAN WITH A KNIFE PLUNGED IN HIS HEART LYING BESIDE A BEAUTIFUL PORTRAIT.

THIS PREMISE OF A MAGICAL PAINTING EASILY LENDED IT FOR A MANGA ADAPTATION. BUT OF COURSE, THERE'D BE NO POINT IN DOING AN ADAPTATION IN THE FIRST PLACE IF I DIDN'T BRING MY OWN STYLE AND IDEAS TO IT. AND SO, I THOUGHT IT'D BE INTERESTING TO HAVE THE STORY SET IN JAPAN INSTEAD. AND WHEN YOU THINK OF FAMOUS JAPANESE PORTRAITS, UKIYO-E PRINTS WOULD OBVIOUSLY COME TO MIND, WHICH IS HOW I DECIDED ON THE EDO-PERIOD AS THE STORY'S SETTING.

AS FOR THE ARTIST, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE NONE OTHER THAN KITAGAWA UTAMARO. ACCORDINGLY, I TOLD MY EDITOR THAT I'D LIKE TO GIVE THE ROLE OF DORIAN GRAY TO A FEMALE IN MY ADAPTATION. MY EDITOR WAS PLEASED WITH MY CHANGES FOR HE WAS A LITTLE WORRIED THAT THE SOURCE MATERIAL MIGHT PROVE TO BE A LITTLE UNINTERESTING FOR THE AVERAGE MODERN READER.

AFTER A LITTLE RESEARCH, I CAME TO REALIZE THAT OSCAR WILDE AND UTAMARO WERE QUITE SIMILAR IN MANY WAYS. THEY WERE BOTH POPULAR ARTISTS OF THEIR TIME, AND THEY BOTH TEMPORARILY SPENT THEIR LATER YEARS IMPRISONED. UTAMARO WAS HANDCUFFED FOR 60 DAYS FOR PUBLISHING PRINTS RELATED TO A BANNED HISTORICAL NOVEL, WHILE WILDE WAS IMPRISONED FOR HOMOSEXUALITY WHICH WAS THEN BANNED IN ENGLAND. IN UTAMARO'S CASE, THE EXPERIENCE CRUSHED HIM BOTH PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY, WHICH LEFT HIM SEVERELY DEPRESSED AND UNABLE TO PAINT ANYMORE. WILDE TOO, LOST MOST OF HIS WILL TO LIVE AFTERWARDS AND SOON DIED AFTER SPENDING HIS LAST YEARS IN EXILE.

EVEN THE YEARS IN WHICH THEY LIVED, 1753-1806 FOR UTAMARO AND 1854-1900 FOR WILDE, WERE QUITE CLOSE. WITH THE IDEA OF THESE TWO TRAGIC ARTISTS OBSESSED WITH BEAUTY IN MIND, I FELT I COULD MAKE AN INTERESTING ADAPTATION.

LASTLY, ALTHOUGH THIS STORY WAS SERIALIZED IN AFTERNOON MAGAZINE UNDER THE TITLE, "UTAMARO," I LATER THOUGHT "HAIGEN UTAMARO" (THE FANTASTICAL UTAMARO) MIGHT BE MORE FITTING, AND SO THE TAIKORAN VERSION WAS PUBLISHED UNDER THAT TITLE.

ALTHOUGH IT WOULD BE CONCEITED OF ME TO SAY MY ADAPTATION IS MORE INTERESTING THAN THE ORIGINAL MATERIAL, I LEAVE THAT UP TO YOU, THE READER TO DECIDE. I WOULD BE HAPPY TO HEAR IF IT AT LEAST PROVED TO BE WORTH YOUR TIME.

NOW AS I CONCLUDE, I'D LIKE TO GIVE ONE LAST THANK YOU TO THE TWO GREAT ARTISTS, KITAGAWA UTAMARO AND OSCAR WILDE. I DEDICATE THIS MANGA TO YOU.

HOODS 200a 10cm

夢幻ウタマロ

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